

E 440

.5

.M85

SPEECH

OF

HON. JUSTIN S. MORRILL, OF VERMONT,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 18, 1861.

The House having under consideration the report from the select committee of thirty-three—

Mr. MORRILL said:

Mr. SPEAKER: It is useless to disguise, and traitorous to increase, the gravity of the occasion. Against the Government established by Washington, a rebellion, formidable in its proportions and portentous in its results, is even now buckling on its armor, and with vigorous diplomacy courting allies. I am painfully aware how vain for me would be the attempt to stay this downward revolution; and, if I cannot arrest it, I will do nothing to accelerate its execrable speed. I do not underrate the martial spirit of the South; and those who imagine there is nothing to be dreaded by the tocsin that assembles the North in arms, know little of the fire that now lies concealed in northern ice. "Let but a single gun be fired in this capital," to use the words of one of my correspondents, "and there would not be men enough left at home in the North to milk the cows." It is growing too evident that in each section of our country the war-dogs only need to be let loose to cut the Gordian knot we have so long unsuccessfully struggled to untie. Expectant heroes, the cavaliers and the roundheads, already stand on tiptoe to vindicate their respective claims; on one side the eagerness to commence, and on the other the reluctance to leave off, a fratricidal war. He that does not pause ere he scars the pages of history with such a contest, is a madman. It is not because I doubt the mettle of my own people that I pause, but because I know their pluck. Therefore, not until all hope of the Union shall pass away, will I whet the edge of animosities by imitating the bad example of some gentlemen in sending forth the war-whoop, instead of sober arguments and reasonable conclusions.

Recognizing the fact that there appeared to be an organized plan to revolutionize and break up the Government, a conspiracy to blot out the Declaration of Independence and subvert the Constitution, I voted in favor of raising the committee of thirty-three, when it was proposed, in order to give those who represented that portion of our country loudest in their complaints an opportunity to be heard to the utmost latitude; and not because any real grievance was visible to me—always excepting that some men were about to go out of office, and others were about to come in. I would consider the complaints of a single individual; and could not, therefore, reject unheard those of whole States. The Representatives from the disaffected section were each our equals, and respectable in numbers, and therefore, if they proposed it, entitled to the right of being heard. I do not regret that vote. This opportunity has been granted; and yet, I confess, while there is a fertility of apprehensions, no real grievance has been made manifest. Our admirable and complex form of Government in all its operations has exhibited as little friction, as little of local hardship, as any ever devised by the wit of man.

It is undeniably true that, if the late election had resulted in the defeat of Mr. Lincoln, no revolution would have been precipitated, and no new guarantees to slavery would have been required at our hands. But, while we have been victorious in the campaign, we are invited to submit to what would not even have been suggested had we been defeated; ay, and invited to submit to what nearly two thirds of the popular vote of the Democratic party itself rejected; for one million three hundred and sixty-five thousand nine hundred and seventy-six Democrats, in voting for Mr. Douglas, voted against the protection of sla-

very in the Territories; and only eight hundred and forty-seven thousand nine hundred and fifty-three for Mr. Breckinridge, in favor of it. Under these circumstances, the demand made is a humiliation to which no party can submit. In 1820 the Missouri compromise was established, and its repeal was never agitated by the North. In 1823 John Quincy Adams was defeated on charges of extravagance, although the expenditure was not one sixth of what we now witness; but the North submitted. In 1832 General Jackson was re-elected on the ground of hostility to the United States Bank; and when the bank went down, all acquiesced. In 1844 Mr. Polk was elected because he was in favor of "the reannexation of Texas," and "extending the area of freedom;" and when Texas came in, with four slave States extended on its banner, even then there was no rebellion. In 1848 the Wilmot proviso was defeated; but no secession followed. In 1854 the Missouri compromise was repealed; and yet the Union stood firm, notwithstanding this combined blunder and crime. In 1860 Mr. Lincoln was elected, because he was opposed to the extension of slavery into the Territories, and opposed to the general maladministration of the Government for the last eight years. That verdict of the people cannot be reversed, except by the people themselves, four years hence. I trust it may never be reversed. Meantime it must be accepted by all order-loving, Constitution-obeying men. If the South did not mean to abide by the result—only on the principle of "heads I win, tails you lose"—they should not have courted the issue, nor made the appeal to the ballot-box. Having participated in the election, it is too late to reject the verdict. They will find consolation in the best of books, "The patient abiding of the righteous shall be turned to gladness."

Whatever fate may betide our country, the Democratic party has much to do to redeem itself from the odium of the present crisis, and I would urge it to that patriotic end. A Democratic President has not used his high prerogative to estop the dismemberment of the Republic, but only to license anarchy. He has looked benignly on secession. Like a clever old man, with unruly sons, he has deprecated their conduct by saying, "Don't; but if I were you I would, and I can't help it if you do." It is not a difficult feat for the officers and crew to scuttle and sink the staunchest of ships; and any Government may go down when its own officers betray their trust, or lapse into corruption and imbecility. The names of those now or recently in command, will have a page not to be envied in future history. Nor will it be lost sight

of that secession begotten and nursed by the wolves of the Democratic party. The true men of this party now take care of their own reputation.

Mr. Speaker, not having been able to coincide with the honorable chairman, who presented the views of the majority of the committee of thirty-three, nor yet altogether with the views of any of the minority reports, I feel it to be my duty to take this method of explaining what, in my judgment, should be done, and what should not be done, with the various subjects upon which we shall soon be called upon to act.

And first let me say, that the course of those occupying extreme positions in the South, before and especially since our assembling here, has made it embarrassing for me, or any of us who would preserve the Constitution in all its vigor, to listen even to words of conciliation; while anything like compromise has never been possible for a moment. Compromises are under the ban of all parties, and to the advocates of secession, who mean revolution, more odious than to any other. If any State or States may withdraw their Senators and Representatives, seize forts, ships, arsenals, mints, hospitals, and dock-yards, whenever an election terminates adversely to their political opinions, and then demand terms—fundamental changes of organic laws—before they will return to their allegiance, what is our Constitution, with all its historic splendor, worth? Should such a course obtain the sanction of serious concessions, the national Government would be forever destroyed, and each member of the family, as they acquired strength and mettle for disobedience, might in turn defy the law and order of the paternal roof unless some portion of authority was abdicated, and some portion of the estate was set apart for exclusive enjoyment. I will do nothing to commit our Republic to this crumbling process of mutiny and decay; I will do nothing to admit the doctrine of secession as the extreme medicine of the Constitution. No one who desires the continuance of the Union should consent to put it in a position of mere sufferance—tenant at will—of one State, nor even a dozen States. Self-preservation forbids that our system should be inoculated with any such virus. If the seceding States desire to quit the Union, and to quit it forever, let them propose constitutional amendments for that purpose, and calmly submit them to the people. This is the only mode by which the end aimed at can be reached without civil war, and the utter demoralization of all the parties who choose to maintain the present Constitution.

I know that the existence of a party, as com-

pared with the existence of the Union, is a matter of utter insignificance. But, at this time, there is but one party which can be relied upon as an entirety, and in all its integrity, in favor of the Union and the Constitution as it is. If this party fails in its duty, or lacks the courage equal to its mission, either the Union will be destroyed, or the Constitution will be so changed that it might cost less to abandon our inheritance thus incumbered than to support it. Union men, in whatever party now to be found, should acknowledge the necessity and unite with us in rescuing the Government from its present dangers; and when we reach calmer seas, we shall have ample time to fight about political differences as practical issues arise. Whether Representatives here show that patriotism or not, I feel sure the people will rally under no other banner than the "stars and stripes."

For one, I cannot make what appears to me to be concessions, nor consent to any measure that shall lower the moral and political standard of the great majority in the North. The South shall have all its rights; but I am commissioned to surrender none. When the principles upon which I was elected a member of this House become dangerous to the country, I shall deem it my duty to resign and go home; but while I believe them vital to its preservation, they will continue to be asserted. Measures intended for humiliation, forcing the majority to capitulate to the minority, will have no countenance from me. But, outside of this, being victors, we can afford to be frank and magnanimous, and do and say what we mean. Rather, we cannot afford anything less. If some future republican traveler from Naples or St. Petersburg shall ever come here to sketch the ruins of this temple of liberty, let him have no data to note that it was shattered by mere perversity of temper. Let the rock upon which we split—slavery extension—and no other, be marked on the map. The assailants of the Union are now in the wrong, and we must keep them so. I will not shut my eyes to the fact that several States, with apparent and sudden sanction of their people, have started to leave us, with the intent never to return. Other fixed stars of the Republic, with fear of change, are perplexing the world. What I can properly do to restore harmony, although it may prove fruitless, I shall try. I will deal in truth, frankness, and conciliation; and shall favor such measures as will not compromise, in my judgment, the great principles of human liberty upon which our Government was established—if such shall be accepted as an adjustment of present difficulties. Whatever I might do under ordinary circumstances, neither more nor less, I shall feel it

incumbent upon me to do now. To the people of the South our party has been most pertinaciously misrepresented; and I am willing to tell them that we intend them no harm; that, if Jefferson and Jackson were not dangerous, their apprehensions are unfounded as to Mr. Lincoln. I am, therefore, willing to give a congressional certificate that we have been slandered; that the Republican party of to-day is no blacker than the Republican party which, for twenty-four years in succession, found in Virginia successful candidates for the Presidency; and that Mr. Hamlin is as immaculately white as is the gentleman from Ohio, [Governor CORWIN.] I feel sure the southern people, goaded by calumnious oratory, have made a suicidal plunge; and I would give time for sober truth to rise and reassert its empire. Not standing on the soulless punctilio that they ought to have known better than to leap into such turbid and bottomless waters, let us fling them at least the driftwood that may float them to the shore. If they can have a chance to return by their own volition, it will cost less than to plunge in after them, and they will be better associates in all time to come.

It is not to those States now in armed revolt that I would offer the calumet; for they are not entitled even to an explanation to save them from suicide. They have not asked it; they have appealed to no tribunal save that of force. But the border States have, as yet, done nothing to earn our hate, something rather to elicit praise; and to them, made glorious by ancestral renown, and by a common fame, precious by holding the ashes of heroes and statesmen whom we have loved with that wonderful love, "passing the love of women," to them let us give assurances of a faithful redemption of all the obligations imposed upon us by the Constitution we have sworn to support, and that fraternal sympathy that shall leave them no excuse for seeking a foreign home.

Among the resolutions reported by the committee, not all of which received my assent, there was one—

"That the several States be respectfully requested to cause their statutes to be revised, with a view to ascertain if any of them are in conflict with, or tend to embarrass or hinder the execution of the laws of the United States;"

to which I did assent, because it is respectful in its tone, pertinent to States South as well as North; and because my own State had already ordered precisely this thing to be done before we assembled here. Moved by her own sense of propriety, Vermont will, in her own good time, do whatsoever is right—because it is right. I have not given critical attention to what are called personal liberty bills, for none of them, nor anything

else, has prevented the execution of the fugitive slave law, though repugnant to a large share of the legal and moral sense of the country, which the President says *has been executed in every contested case*. That cannot be said of the neutrality laws to prevent filibusterism, nor of the laws for the suppression of the African slave trade.

So far as the legislation of Vermont is concerned, I think it has been intended to maintain her reputation as the purest democracy in the world, the very sanctuary of liberty, and to throw around all her inhabitants, however humble, the safeguards of the writ of *habeas corpus* and trial by jury, as well as to prevent the nefarious crime of kidnapping from being committed within her borders.

Such laws as these are common, and ought to be, to all the States. They are merely legislative authority to enforce a bill of rights, "dear to freemen and formidable to tyrants only," and stand, as the flaming sword to defend the *rights of man*, as recognized in all our republican constitutions, whenever they shall be assailed.

By the decision of the Supreme Court in the case of *Prigg vs. Pennsylvania*, which subsequent events have rendered historical, it was decided that the master could seize his slave as any other property, wherever found, if there was no State law against it. Much of the legislation complained of was therefore set in motion, to compel masters to resort to United States authority, and prevent the possibility of lawless seizure of free black men. In the same case, it was decided that the legislation of Congress excludes all State legislation on the subject. Free State Legislatures, therefore, very generally prohibited their officers from aiding or assisting in such business. If this shows a lack of comity, it was in pursuance of this decision of the Supreme Court. It is true, also, that the rigors of the fugitive slave act of 1850 multiplied and intensified such statutes. If, however, in doing this, State Legislatures have transcended the object aimed at, and any of their statutes conflict with that section of the Constitution of the United States which declares, that "no person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor," they should be repealed without debate. It is never to be forgotten, and especially not now, that the "Constitution and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof" is "the supreme law of the land," "anything in the constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding."

One of the propositions of the committee, as offered by the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts, is to provide an amendment to the Constitution which shall forbid any possible future interference with slavery in the States where it exists. Such, unquestionably, is the true meaning of the Constitution now. I know of no party having the remotest intention of giving it any other construction. The Republican party, of all others, bound themselves in the most solemn form by the fourth resolution of the Chicago platform, thus:

"That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the States, and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depends; and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any State or Territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes."

That is explicit, and among cool men would be so regarded. Unfortunately, all men at this time are not cool. The resolution unanimously adopted by this House on the 11th of February last is even more explicit. Every member, Republicans inclusive, for once in harmony.

"Resolved, That neither Congress nor the people or government of any non-slaveholding State has the constitutional right to legislate upon, or interfere with, slavery in any slaveholding State in the Union."

Surely, after this, the possibility of deception must be considered effectually throttled. Only those who desire to be cheated can be cheated.

I have been unwilling to consider any amendment to the Constitution, lest a master work should be botched by journeymen; and I have tolerated the idea at this point alone, not because I thought it necessary, but that, if accepted as an adjustment of present difficulties, it might, by perpetuating a part of our present Constitution—reënacting it, if you please—perpetuate the whole. But I have, as yet, had no assurances that this will be taken in any larger sense than of "good so far as it goes." To secure my support, it must be taken as a full and final settlement. To that end, guarantees against the heresies of secession would be indispensable.

I know of no one who claims or desires the constitutional power to interfere with the domestic institutions of any State. Whenever the affirmative of that doctrine shall be maintained, it will be in some remote age, when all State rights shall have become extinct, and the spirit of the people so tamed as to be ready to submit to imperial despotism. Then the Federal Government may as easily establish slavery in a free State as to abolish it in a slave State.

The particular form which this proposition has assumed appears to me objectionable, and unnecessarily complicated; and all that part which makes a discrimination between the States should be stricken out. But, if the substance of such a declaration could serve the great purpose of conciliation in the present exigencies of the country, I would go to the extreme verge of liberality in order to give it my assent. We are either in favor of ultimate interference with slavery in the States where it exists, or we are against it. Now, if against it—though we may consider it surplusage—why may we not put the subject beyond even the power of willful misrepresentation? As a mere matter of taste, I would not vote for it; but I would be willing to sacrifice taste for the Union. The proof is abundant that southern men have indulged, and do indulge, in serious charges, if not real apprehensions, on this point; and if the measure proposed would carry healing on its wings, it appears to me to be one that may be tendered without sacrifice. I presume, however, it will fail to receive that support from gentlemen of the South which would indicate that it is sufficient for the evils complained of; and then it will be useless to offer as a remedy what the patient avows will be flung out of the window, and may properly be abandoned. Should the seceding States stand aloof, it would be vain to attempt to give efficacy to this measure, as its only inducement—general coöperation—would be wanting.

If it be said that this would be a surrender of any principle, I ask how? We have already solemnly abjured it. It is not, unless you intend to accomplish an unconstitutional end by constitutional means, and the chance of doing that even, can be computed by tracing out the process. As it requires three fourths of all the States to carry any amendment of the Constitution, with fifteen slave States sure to vote against it, no amendment authorizing interference with slavery in the States could succeed, until the whole number of States amounted to sixty, and of these it would require the entire concurrence of forty-five. It is unnecessary to spend more time in discussing a measure that cannot pass, and which, if it could pass, would not give the slave States one whit more of security than they now practically enjoy.

The present fugitive slave law, confided to magistrates unknown to the Constitution, who, it was assumed, would need five dollars more to be persuaded to decide a case in favor of slavery than for freedom, merciless in its summary process, and with no trial by jury, compulsory upon all citizens to join in the hunt of any runaway, so obnoxious in its features that it would almost

seem to have been made repulsive by design, has yet been held by the highest judicial tribunals legally and technically constitutional. Such being the decision, nullification by inferior courts or Legislatures is no remedy for its faults, as their action is itself a nullity. The amendments proposed by the committee, although they may not reach to the extent of amelioration that they might have done without impairing the constitutional purposes of the law, are yet steps in the right direction; and though they will not secure alacrity in the ordinary execution of the law, so long as life and liberty are more precious than property, they will remove the general excuse for mobs. No proposition to amend the law of 1850 would be likely to fail of being an improvement; and these amendments ought not to be refused by any just legislator, unless other provisions of an objectionable character shall be ingrafted upon them in their progress through this House, calculated to defeat substantial improvements here tendered.

Another proposition of the committee is an enabling act for the admission of the Territory of New Mexico as a State in the course of the ensuing year. I am ready to admit that this would practically dispose of all the territory we now have to which the slaveholding States set up any claim in their *ultimatum* of a restoration of the Missouri line; but it leaves open what they hold to be the paramount question of the disposal of *territory hereafter to be acquired*, and will not therefore be satisfactory, even if the question that it would become a slaveholding State was free of doubt.

The fatal objection to this measure is that the civilization of the territory is unequal to the task of supporting a State government. I trust that they are making progress in wealth and education; but there is no evidence present showing either their capacity or desire to embark in the experiment.

To be entirely frank, I do not think it can ever practically become a slave State. It must forever remain a pastoral country. Whatever its mines, real or fabulous, may attract, its tillage land, skirting the borders of streams only, its arid wastes destitute of water, can never support a population, much beyond its present numbers; nor can a cheaper labor be substituted for that which now prevails.

By the organic act passed ten years ago, in addition to the rights obtained by treaty, New Mexico obtained the right of admission into the Union with or without slavery; and during eight years of that time, the whole Federal patronage of the Government has succeeded in permanently

forcing into that Territory eleven slaves only, ten of whom are women. With this state of facts I cannot but think whenever, sooner or later, the subject shall be discussed, as it would be at the formation of a constitution, and all outside pressure on the people shall be removed, they will decide the question in favor of human freedom. But any people willing to vote *peon servitude* upon themselves, as they do in New Mexico, are hardly to be trusted with the destinies of a State.

Under ordinary circumstances I should vote against enabling New Mexico to come into the Union at the present time; and I cannot find anything in the present condition of affairs to release me from the obligation of doing so now. It has not been made apparent, if this measure could receive the entire vote of this side of the House, that it would be acceptable as a measure of adjustment. But were it otherwise, I should not vote for it; because it wears the appearance of an evasion of principles heretofore made prominent, and which I am unwilling to veil in a cloud.

There is another proposition, founded upon the same section in the Constitution upon which the law for the return of persons held to service escaping into another State is based, in relation to fugitives from justice, which, in my opinion, would in practice prove unsatisfactory, and instead of curing present irritations, would multiply them tenfold. Heretofore, the requisition has been made by the chief executive officer of one State upon the chief executive officer of another State. It is now proposed to make this requisition "upon the district judge of the United States of the district" in which the criminal may be found, whose duties are so defined and limited as necessarily to give the criminal laws of local Legislatures a wider and even national application, and at the same time blots out the sovereignty of a State altogether. If it be solely a judicial question to be determined, I answer that the Governors of most States are apt to be as able jurists as the judges of these district courts; nor can political prejudices be avoided by the change, for judges are now often appointed as much in reference to their political affinities as to their legal knowledge. The demand must be made by a Governor, and it is proper that it should be responded to by an equal. Under the present practice, Governors surrender fugitives from justice when the charge alleged would be a crime in the State to which they have fled. That would seem to be a rule far less liable to abuse than the one proposed, and as equal and just as can be devised. I trust this most exceptionable project to change the old law will receive the decided negative of

all sides of the House, and of State-rights men especially.

Failing of success in the late election of President, though still maintaining supremacy in both branches of Congress, the southern States now demand as their ultimatum, and as a condition precedent of their faithful adherence to the present Constitution, a recognizance and protection of slaves as property in all the territory we now have, or may hereafter acquire, south of 36° 30', north latitude. This is, in part, the Crittenden compromise. It is proposed to make this a part of the Constitution. So far as it would be a revival of the Missouri compromise, it would certainly seem expedient to place it where it could not become "inoperative and void" through the action of the party now renewing the proposition, as well as safe from the reach of the Supreme Court, lest history should repeat itself. But what is the necessity for this measure? Slavery has already obtained a foothold in all this Territory, protected by the Territorial Legislature, and hedged in by impending decisions of the Supreme Court. Is it not enough that this is a fact, but must the minority be forced to concede the fate of an empire not yet within our grasp? The conclusion is irresistible that it is not, after all, a contest about the condition of what we now possess, but whether we shall hereafter acquire territory now free, and force slavery into it without allowing the conquered people to say even whether they will tolerate it or not. This invasive purpose, too, is to be announced in advance, and emblazoned in the very forehead of our Constitution.

The whole of this claim, as must have been foreseen, will meet with an emphatic denial. There is no part of it worthy of the sanction of a great and high-minded people. If the desire was simply room for the expansion of slavery into New Mexico, that is practically enjoyed already. If the desire reaches beyond that; if it is Sonora and Chihuahua that is hunted in the distance, let those who mean it avow it. Then the question would be squarely presented, whether those Mexican provinces must be obtained at the cost of breaking up the Union or not; whether secession or Mexico should be conquered; whether South Carolina or Cuba must be bought. Not until after the present dangerous fit of indigestion shall have passed away, can the American people be induced to swallow more of the disjointed limbs of priest-ridden Mexico; and I trust their hunger in that direction is forever appeased. I knew a man once who was always in litigation about the boundary lines of his land, and a neighbor said of him, that he believed "if the cap'n owned all Paradise he

would quarrel with the devil just for a little strip more for a hog pasture!" Have we not enough? Then let us not quarrel about any more little strips. But, come what may, the North will stand by the declaration of Henry Clay, and "no earthly power can compel them to vote for the positive introduction of slavery, either south or north of that line," (36° 30'.)

I do not propose to marshal the resources of the free States, nor to consider how tolerable might be their condition when left alone, or after the withdrawal of the slave States, and the accession of the Canadas and other British provinces—the failure of the first being the only possible hindrance to the last—but I wish to make a way-side remark touching the threat of sending certain States to "Coventry."

I know it is the fashion of some parties to sneer at New England, to talk of a reconstruction of a Union with this part left out, "sloughed off;" but this imbecile spite does not even excite pity. It will be found that almost every free State has its New England within its borders, and thus leavened, some for aught I know, are in advance of the Puritan stock. It is evident the political Jonah would not be disposed of, even if "down east" were to be thrown overboard. They remember the fable of members rebelling against the head, but will let others make the application. New England makes no apology for the past, and will indulge in no envy for the future; but having no invincible sectional hatreds, if any can do better than herself, she will bid them God speed. It might be pertinent to remind those who flippantly talk of ostracizing such a people, that when the old Greek philosopher was banished from Sinope, he retorted: And I condemn you to *stay in Sinope*. Certainly Vermont begs for no concessions, asks no guarantees. For years and in her infancy she stood alone, and such a doom, now in her maturity, were it possible to be enforced, would have no terrors for her, as almost each one of her inhabitants possesses within their own homes the means—industry and unconquerable will—of absolute independence. She can both feed and clothe herself with the plow, the loom, and the anvil, no matter whether cotton or wool, flax or hemp, is *king*.

These taunts do not arise from a positive dislike to the thrift of New England character, nor to their eminence in all the highways of modern civilization, for among the most seductive arguments addressed by secessionists to Georgia, to North Carolina, to Virginia, and to Maryland, each in turn, we find this: that *they* will become the *new* New England of the cotton heptarchy;

but the disgust arises from the obstinate vote of New England; and, though I am for conciliation, I cannot honestly say that I foresee any millennium at hand when they will have repented of the fanaticism they have so long manifested in the persecution of the prophets of modern democracy, as that party will, I fear, continue to furnish abundant provocation.

There seems to be a tenacity of purpose, by some amendment of the Constitution, to foist the word *slavery* into that instrument, in order to secure to it, by a prolific brood of logical inferences, a higher degree of protection as property. Not content with the language of the Constitution, it is hoped to make the rose, not more aromatic, but still entitled to higher consideration under another name. I have not time to discuss the length and breadth of this apparently very innocent proposition, and will only say that the language of the framers of the Constitution was well chosen, expressed all they intended, and all we intend now and forever. Whether slaves are merely property or persons, in the language of Sterne, "Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, slavery, said I, still thou art a bitter draught."

The idea of a reconstruction of the Constitution held out by the architects of ruin, who now bear despotic sway in the South, to those who hesitate to break away from the ark of our covenant, is a fraud in its southern aspect, as South Carolina and the autocratic Yanceys have already imperiously indicated, and wholly fallacious in its northern aspect, as time will surely proclaim. The leaders in the cotton States mean something far different from a reconstruction, and nothing less than revolution and its consequences have been invoked from the outset. They may snatch some parts of our system of government; but, like the fortresses they have sieged, they will be converted to unwonted uses; and, stiff with the embroidery of new devices, seek protection no longer against majorities, but against minorities. Once escaped from the power of majorities, good care will be taken that minorities are henceforth handcuffed.

But, to suppose that nineteen free States would consent to give slavery greater power or privileges, under a reconstruction of the Constitution, than was consented to seventy years ago, when there was but one free State, is simply absurd. It is a libel upon the age. Who will contend that, though all other nations have been steadily advancing to a higher plane of freedom, the American people have relapsed from their own keynote? While the North does not, and will not, seek to retract or avoid any point in the present

compact, if the question is ever opened, it would be all opened; and property represented on one side of Mason and Dixon's line would be on the other, or none at all. Open all these questions, and the grievances of the North, now dumb, would find voice, and, unless redressed by constitutional guarantees, relief would be snatched in the separation already offered. There is no reactionary spirit that can extort greater submission to slavery from the present age than was conceded by Franklin and Sherman, Hancock and Adams.

If the South would live in peace and escape the agitation of the subject of slavery, they have only to cease thrusting forward their aggressive policy of its extension—a policy that cannot escape the stern and enlightened resistance of all Christendom. In a speech made by me at the last session of Congress, I showed that the South already enjoyed her full share of territory in proportion to her population, and that, should all the remainder be appropriated to the use of the North, it would be only at last a fair and equal division. There is no inequality or injustice to slaveholders in the exclusion of slaves from the Territories. As the London Times aptly suggests, "the South is not to be excluded from Territories unless the Southrons consider themselves in the light, not of slaveholders, but of slaves."

Mr. Speaker, I speak not of the sacrifice of blood and treasure it cost to create our present Union—not of the glories in its civil history; not of its eminent prowess in military and naval exploits; not of its grandeur and power among the great nations of the earth; not of its accumulations of legal learning; nor yet of the illuminated chapters in its administrative precedents, to all of which, though American character is only yet in the bud, secession bids adieu forever; but I will ask, what higher gauge of prosperity can a southern military republic hold out than we have witnessed and now hold within our grasp in these United States? In what part of the world is labor more remunerative, or wealth less impeded by

taxation? Is there any denial of this in the planting States? Why, sir, they have incontestably grown rich. Have not the number of their slaves quadrupled, and their value more than quadrupled, in threescore years and ten? The advance of the American people in national and individual wealth—the standing marvel of the world—is such that it has for forty years attracted, and still continues largely to attract, the enterprising emigrant from every nation and tongue on the globe. The average scale of the comforts of life here obtained, the enjoyments incident to cultivated society here so widely diffused, find no parallel in any other land. These things may be bravely altered, but are they likely to be altered for the better? New inventions do not always enthrone the inventors. While it is obvious that no single right which is now claimed to be withheld can be secured through the doors of secession, the only new right which will belong to this attitude will be the right to make war upon the United States.

Let me appeal, then, to all parties, to try to live under that Union a little longer which has not only secured our property, guarded so well all our material interests, but which has received the commendation of the enlightened world and given to us a name not surpassed in all the monuments of history. Give us another span of seventy years, and prolong the hopes of mankind in the possibility of man's power of self-government. Do not let us break up the model with which patriots, though with unequal steps, in contiguous as well as far distant countries, have struggled and are struggling to mold institutions like those among which our own still live the leading example. But if all our attempts to put off the evil day shall fail, and this matchless form of free Government is to be put to the extremest peril, it will rally all the vigor remaining in its Constitution in behalf of self-preservation. It cannot abnegate its power, and it will not die willingly. The great heart of the nation will confront all dangers, and survive, I trust, to cover friends and foes with countless blessings.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 443 6



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 443 6

